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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

COMPLIMENTS OF
C. J. DOYLE,
SECRETARY OF STATE.

# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

# GOVERNOR RICHARD YATES

BEFORE THE

## 42D GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

## STATE OF ILLINOIS.

Jan 1 1901

*Gentlemen of the Forty-second General Assembly and Fellow Citizens:*

The Constitution of the State of Illinois specifically provides that the Governor shall, at the commencement of each session, and at the close of his term of office, give to the General Assembly information, by message, of the condition of the State, and shall recommend such measures as he shall deem expedient. It also requires him, at the commencement of each regular session, to present estimates of the amount of money required to be raised by taxation for all purposes. The able and exhaustive message to the General Assembly which has just been transmitted thereto by my distinguished predecessor, the Hon. John R. Tanner, has fully complied with these requirements of the Constitution; so fully, indeed, that were I disposed to consider myself required by the Constitution to furnish additional information, I would be at a loss to know where to go to get it. The Constitution nowhere provides that the Governor coming into office after the commencement of a session shall give to the General Assembly by message, either information or recommendation of measures or estimates of taxation. The Governor will, doubtless, always be within the implied, if not express, prerogatives of his office whenever, in his judgment, he shall deem it expedient to communicate with the General Assembly by proper message.

Many of my predecessors have, when about to come into office, found such a condition of affairs that they have deemed it best to, in their inaugural addresses, both convey information and recommend legislation. They were, of course, justified in so doing. For myself, however, believing, as I do, that the Constitution does not require specific recommendations from a new Governor

before he has, by experience, acquired information and learned what measures ought to be recommended, I feel compelled to say that at this time my knowledge of State affairs is so limited that it would be discourteous to attempt to convey that limited knowledge to the Legislature. And, as to recommendations, I have had so little opportunity to weigh the merits of the great number of measures which have been suggested, that I feel that I might be pursuing a mistaken course were I now to indulge in recommendation of any of them. If, at any time within the session, I shall become satisfied that it is my duty to recommend to the General Assembly any particular subject for consideration, I shall not hesitate to exercise the constitutional perogatives of the executive in that particular, feeling well assured that the General Assembly will appreciate my motives in then communicating with them, as doubtless they do now appreciate my present action in refraining from so doing.

The fact that I have no suggestions to make to you, the General Assembly, with reference to measures to come before you at this session, does not debar me from endeavoring to briefly give expression to some of the feelings which follow us to this place. This occasion is of import to us all. Its significance is not to be belittled. It is not merely an hour of pardonable pleasure and pride to the six of us who have assumed the responsibility of officials of the State at large. To every member of the State Senate and House it is also a moment of consequence. Although days have passed since you, in both your houses, perfected your organization and arranged preliminary details, you have scarcely, as yet, settled into your respective places, and this hour begins, in fact, your active service. It is appropriate that, while you are pausing, so to speak, before entering upon the performance of your active duties, the State, too, should pause, and, with due satisfaction reflect that here, at its capitol, there sit, as its Senators and Representatives, this body of far-sighted, clear-headed and high-minded men. It is quite certain that this General Assembly can not suffer by comparison. Illinois has just cause to feel proud of its Legislature, and to rely upon the fidelity of that Legislature.

I need not exhort you to wear your honors worthily; but I may be permitted to remind you that to do so is no easy matter. The difficulties and perplexities continually confronting the legislator are not generally appreciated. They are necessarily many and great. More than that, they are complex and intricate. They involve exhaustive attention. Many times State legislators get little credit for their labors, which are really arduous. In the performance of their duties, the line between the right and the wrong is often somewhat obscured and hard to find. There will doubtless be many times, in trying days to come, when you and I both will seek for a time, at least, almost in vain for absolutely satisfactory solution of pending problems. Good intentions alone will not suffice for our correct guidance. So many different factors may affect any given situation that the result will, if we are not very careful, be far from either desirable to us or advantageous to the people—and this in spite of all lofty motive and high incentive and sincere desire to do right. Such being the case, it is certainly ground for congratulation that, in the present General Assembly, there undoubtedly abide, in fact, both that lofty motive and that high incentive which the people so much desire and so much deserve.

We all realize that there is, for the time being, no power to rectify our errors, if we make them. There is no immediate help for the State, if, from your hands and mine, there comes, during the ensuing two years, a fabric of legislation which is defective in construction and detrimental in effect. It behooves us all, therefore, to, in all that we do, move and act with wise and just instincts. We should consider well, before we disturb well settled conditions which are satisfactory. I am satisfied that such is the wish of the people. There is a wide spread feeling in all states that there may be too much government and too many laws. I participate in this feeling myself, and so do many of you. Indeed, it is, in part, because of this feeling that I have decided not to make any recommendations to you concerning legislation. There doubtless never was a law so good but that it might be bettered by amendment. There doubtless are many of our laws which could be improved. There are, perhaps, some which ought to be abolished. There probably are some which ought to be abolished, provided other better ones

could be put in their places. And lastly, there are probably some entirely new which ought to be passed. As a matter of course, proper appropriation bills and an equitable reapportionment are absolutely essential.

There does not, however, seem to me to be any pressing neccessity or demand for a large quantity of new legislation. No hidden significance attaches to this suggestion. I have no plans for legislation. I have in contemplation no statute which I would pass or repeal, if such passage or repeal were in my power. But, owing, perhaps, to my inexperience in such matters, I have been much impressed and, indeed, somewhat startled, by the multitude of suggestions which have come to me, urging me to recommend amendments and additions to our statutes. Hundreds of such propositions and suggestions are on their way to this Legislature. Doubtless the greater part of them are worthy of most serious and earnest investigation. Such investigation will be earnestly demanded. Conscientious consideration should, of course, be given, and you will not withhold it. Two things are absolutely vital to the proper transaction of public business. First, the aim of the official must be high enough, and, second, all progress must be practical. If the motive is not lofty, the promised good can not be hoped for. And, on the other hand, if the action is not inspired always by common sense, the ideal, however elevated, will fail wholly of fruition. I feel sure that in all matters we can be conservative without being narrow-minded, and can avoid both undue haste and undue delay.

I wish to assure the General Assembly that in their desire for the maintenance of relations of the utmost harmony between all the departments of the State government, the State officials who have today taken the official oath all heartily concur. From such a state of general good feeling there always certainly results the promotion of the highest interests of the commonwealth. And with this there comes, inevitably, the approval of men of all parties, creeds, convictions and conditions. And, following this, there results that gratification, satisfaction and peace of mind which public officials can only feel when having the knowledge of duty done.

As for myself, had I not already fully resolved and expected to coöperate in all proper measures for the common weal, to the fullest extent within my power, with every branch of the State administration, the solemnity of the oath which I have just taken would constrain me to do so. This inaugural oath is not a mere repetition of the pledge which we have made, you and I and all of us, upon the hustings. It is true that we have, without exception, irrespective of party, repeatedly told the people that, if elected to the positions which we now by their favor occupy, we would compel economy, efficiency and humanity in the management of the concerns of the people and in the care of their institutions.

But the oath we have taken today is a different thing. It is required of us because the people have taken us at our word. It is a solemn obligation. It is a sacred thing. It is a covenant. The pledge upon the stump is simply a promise. The official oath is a binding pledge to redeem that promise, because it has been relied upon and rights have accrued under it. It is, moreover, the formal acknowledgment of the acceptance of great trust. The people of the State of Illinois have, indeed, trusted us. They have constituted us the guardians of a commonwealth made precious and hallowed and dear to them by eighty-two years of glorious history—eighty-two years of great thought, of great events, of great, grand men, of great times, of awful trial and agony, and again of signal triumph, and again of almost miraculous prosperity and progress and power. And we have in the eye of all the people solemnly accepted the solemn trust. We have registered our oath in the hearts of men to the most remote regions of the State. The ancients called the oath taken by the defenders of the state the "sarcramentum," and, in all the ages since, the most solemn rituals of the most exacting creeds have known no stronger word by which to call their most sacred ordinances. The modern oath should be no less sacred.

An inspiring thought, in this connection, is that we have the honor of being connected with the first State administration in the new century. The controlling spirit of the coming hundred years is to be distinctively different from that of the century which has just expired. The nineteenth century has been

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a century of strife, an era of conflict and desperate fighting hand to hand, and pushing onward and upward, step by step, to the attainment of human rights. Our country has had its part in all this contention, and little by little it has struggled dauntlessly on until, at last, as a matter of fact, whether we like to call it so or not, it has become one of the great powers of Christendom and of civilization—until the name America has become enshrined in the heart of humanity—and until, at the mention of that great name, tyrants tremble on their thrones ten thousand miles away. Our country's fight has been to accomplish all the things that make up national salvation and human happiness. It has fought only when it had to. It has not gloried unduly in the victories it has been compelled to win. But it has been determined and has known no fear. Its power has left its impress upon the century, never to be obliterated.

The coming century is to be one of performance of duty. Human rights having been in large part obtained, duty now presents its claims. And, aggressive as it has been in the past in the fight for human rights, America will be more aggressive still in the duty-work of the new century. And in the glorious future, in which America will be the central figure, leading all nations, our State will be expected to perform well its part. Illinois is now, in population, a fifteenth part of the nation. It is, in influence, much more than a fifteenth part. Its ever-increasing influence will probably affect the nation and the world, within a generation, much more vitally than we now can imagine or conceive. What a magnificent century this will be, if it is, in all respects, started right. What a thing it is to be entrusted, for even a short time, with the care of the interests of the people of such a State at the beginning of such a century. What a power there is in our humble hands at this time to contribute to the progress of this State towards its magnificent destiny. That progress may be troubled or it may be tranquil. Whatever the complications may be, whether they involve peace or war, let us remember that, so far as we are concerned, we stand in the shadow of our mighty oath. We can not now realize all that it may involve. But we approach our duties full of the thought that it may involve much.

The greatest of all the sons of Illinois—he whose portrait hangs in this hall, opposite to the portrait of the great Douglas—immediately after taking the oath of office as chief magistrate of the American people, just about forty years ago, said: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy this government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it."

We know now, in the light of his matchless career, that words failed him utterly, when at his inauguration he strove to give suitable expression to the sentiments of his inmost soul. For we know now what was in his thought when he raised his hand and kissed the book and completed the act that absolutely and forever bound his loving heart and mighty mind and sublime soul to the glorious cause of the American people. Well did he keep his oath. Having proclaimed his purpose to rely solely for the help which he needed to perform his stupendous task upon "the great American people and that God who has never forsaken them," he simply did so.

You and I know that he received the help that he asked for—received it from millions of loyal hearts and from the infinite power on high. He put one hand in the outstretched palm of the American people, and with the other he laid a strong hold on the almighty arm of the Almighty God, and, standing there, supported by humanity and supported by Divinity, Abraham Lincoln fought the grandest fight and won the grandest victory this world has ever seen since the Savior walked among the sons of men.

In humble imitation today of his august example, may not you and I get away from the mere words of our obligation, and without endeavoring to express all that it means, yet realize the fundamental fact that we have registered an oath which no other men but we are now subject to, and that from this hour our duty to all the generations of Illinois, past, present and to come, is to stand up, like men, in our brief day and fulfill the oath in spirit and in truth.